

“SLAY THEM NOT”:  
AUGUSTINE AND THE JEWS IN MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

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ABSTRACT

This essay lays the historiographical foundation for a forthcoming book on ideas of the Jew in medieval Christianity, ideas which depended considerably on Augustine's doctrine of "Jewish witness": the notion that the Jews served a vital testimonial function in a properly ordered Christian society. Following a brief explanation of the doctrine and its historical significance, attention turns to its treatment by its three most important investigators of the last half-century: Bernhard Blumenkranz, a medieval historian; Marcel Dubois, an authority on medieval scholastic philosophy; and Paula Fredriksen, a scholar of patristics. In each case, the essay discusses the writer's contribution to the field, exploring his/her presuppositions and methodology and assessing the need for still further research.

Historians generally agree that Catholic attitudes toward the Jews in the Middle Ages owed much to the ideas of Augustine of Hippo.<sup>1</sup> When Bernard of Clairvaux appealed for Christians to take part in the Second Crusade, when Pope Innocent III deplored the alleged Jewish exploitation of Christians in Western Europe, and when Thomas Aquinas wrote that Christians as a rule ought not to tolerate the rites of infidels, each one of them hastened to add that the Jewish presence served a purpose in Christian society and therefore should not be eradicated. In the words of Innocent's papal decree,

In order that Cain be a wanderer and a vagabond on earth and not be killed by anyone, the Lord placed a tremor in his head as a sign. Wherefore the Jews, against whom the voice of the blood of Jesus Christ cries out, even if *they should not be killed, lest the Christian people forget the divine law*, they

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<sup>1</sup> Among others, see, for example, Bernhard Blumenkranz, *Les auteurs chrétiens latins du Moyen Age sur les Juifs et le Judaïsme* (Paris, 1963), and the articles collected in his *Juifs et Chrétiens: Patristique et Moyen Age* (London, 1977); Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide* (New York, 1974), pp. 148-49; Kenneth R. Stow, "Hatred of the Jews or Love of the Church: Papal Policy toward the Jews in the Middle Ages," in *Antisemitism through the Ages*, ed. Shmuel Almog, tr. Nathan H. Reisner (Oxford, 1988), pp. 73ff. and *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), pp. 17-20; Gilbert Dahan, "L'article *Judei* de la *Summa Abel* de Pierre le Chantre," *Revue des études augustinienes* 27 (1981), 105-126; Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1982), pp. 19ff.; and Shlomo Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews: History*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies: Studies and Texts 109 (Toronto, 1991), pp. 4-6, 290ff.

still should be scattered like wanderers about the earth, until their face be filled with shame and they seek out the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Much as he found the Jews' behavior in Christendom intolerable, Innocent affirmed his obligation to insure for their preservation. To be sure, the pope here alluded to the forecast of Paul's Epistle to the Romans (11:17-31) that the Jews would convert to Christianity at the end of days, and he reasoned that he shared in the responsibility to provide for the fulfillment of that Pauline prophecy. Yet Innocent first observed that the Jews should not be killed, *lest the Christian people forget the divine law*, and he thereby invoked that principle of Augustinian theology which we may call the doctrine of Jewish witness.

The Jews, Augustine taught, preserved the teachings of the Old Testament that Christianity had fulfilled— in their books, in their practice of Judaism, and in their very selves. Consequently, they, their rites, their scriptures, and their dispersion in exile from their land all testified to the roots of the New Testament in the Old, and to God's replacement of the old covenant of Mosaic law with his new covenant of grace and salvation in Christ. The Jews and Judaism demonstrated to the detractors of the church that Christianity was not a recent fabrication; the iniquity of the Jews notwithstanding, they still had a vital role to play in the divine economy of salvation. Thus did Augustine's *De civitate Dei* explain the history of the Jews and their religion in the wake of their opposition to Jesus.

Yet the Jews who slew him and chose not to believe in him . . . , having been vanquished rather pathetically by the Romans, completely deprived of their kingdom (where foreigners were already ruling over them), and scattered throughout the world (so that they are not lacking anywhere), are testimony for us through their own scriptures that we have not contrived the prophecies concerning Christ. . . . Hence, when they do not believe our scriptures, their own, which they read blindly, are thus fulfilled in them. . . . For we realize that on account of this testimony, which they unwillingly provide for us by having and by preserving these books, they are scattered among all the nations, wherever the church of Christ extends itself. For there is a prophecy given previously in the psalms (which they still read) concerning this, where it is written . . . : "Slay them not, lest at any time they forget your law (*legem tuam*); scatter them in your might. . . ." Therefore, he did not kill them—that is, he did not make them cease living as Jews,

<sup>2</sup> Shlomo Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews: Documents, 492-1404*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies: Studies and Texts 94 (Toronto, 1988), pp. 92-93; Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century*, rev. ed. (New York, 1966), p. 126. Cf. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Epistolae* 363, ed. Jean Leclercq and H. Rochais, 2 vols., S. Bernardi opera 7-8 (Rome, 1977), 8:311-17; and my analysis of this text in "Witnesses of Our Redemption": The Jews in the Crusading Theology of Bernard of Clairvaux," in *Medieval Studies in Honour of Avrom Saltman*, ed. Bat-Sheva Albert et al., Bar-Ilan Studies in History 4 (Ramat-Gan, 1995), pp. 67-81; and Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 2-2.10.11.

although conquered and oppressed by the Romans – lest, having forgotten the law of God, they not be able to offer testimony on our behalf. Thus it was inadequate for him to say, “Slay them not, lest at any time they forget your law,” without adding further, “scatter them.” For if they were not everywhere, but solely in their own land with this testimony of the scriptures, the church, which is everywhere, could not have them among all the nations as witnesses to the prophecies given previously regarding Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Augustine’s novel and distinctive interpretation of Psalm 59:12 afforded his notion of *why the Jews had survived* the authority of a biblical mandate that *they should survive*. As I have argued in earlier publications,<sup>4</sup> for as long as medieval churchmen perceived the Jew as performing his testimonial function, they understood this Augustinian exegesis as an injunction against the extermination, forced conversion, or violent persecution of the Jews in their midst.

But what significance did the doctrine of Jewish witness assume in Augustine’s own theological discourse? What idea of the Jew and of Judaism did the doctrine reflect? How did these constructions take shape and function within the development of Augustinian thought, which generally manifested little concern for the Jews of Augustine’s own day? In a forthcoming book,<sup>5</sup> I have analyzed the doctrine of Jewish witness and studied the chronology of its crystallization in the writings of Augustine; I argue that the doctrine of “Slay them not” received its full, mature elaboration only during the last two decades of his life and as a by-product of developments in Augustine’s biblical hermeneutics, his philosophy of history, and his appreciation of human sexuality—concerns much more central to his theological career than the proper treatment of the Jews. In the present essay I offer historiographical background to my longer study, surveying three recent scholarly treatments of the doctrine of Jewish witness that have proven significant in my own understanding of Augustine’s ideas.

All modern investigators of our subject share a rightful debt to the scholarly opus of Bernhard Blumenkranz, whose treatment of Augustine’s work and outlook on the Jews and Judaism has determined the parameters—and often the conclusions—of much of the subsequent historiography. Published in 1946, in the immediate aftermath of World War II, Blumenkranz’s *Die Judenpredigt Augustins* comprises an exhaustive review and analysis of Augustine’s *Tractatus adversus Iudaeos*; it evaluates the sermon in view of its predecessors

<sup>3</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 18.46, CCSL 48:644-45.

<sup>4</sup> See my *The Friars and the Jews*; “The Jews as the Killers of Christ in the Latin Tradition, from Augustine to the Friars,” *Traditio* 39 (1983), 1-27; and “Scholarship and Intolerance in the Medieval Academy: The Study and Evaluation of Judaism in European Christendom,” *American Historical Review* 91 (1986), 592-613.

<sup>5</sup> *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity*.

and contemporaries in the Latin *Adversus Iudaeos* tradition, in addition to other passages mentioning the Jews in the Augustinian corpus itself. Late in the following decade, Blumenkranz reiterated the conclusions of his monograph in a shorter but helpfully more discursive essay, "Augustin et les Juifs; Augustin et le Judaïsme."<sup>6</sup> Blumenkranz's reading of the Augustinian corpus led him to conclude that its posture *vis-à-vis* the Jews conformed in large measure to that of the Christian *Adversus Iudaeos* literature which had preceded it—in its milieu, in its contents, and in its ramifications. Still, Blumenkranz demonstrated the novelty in Augustine's view that the Jewish Diaspora served a positive purpose in Christendom, verifying Old Testament prophecy concerning Jesus and the church. Not least important, Blumenkranz also reflected upon the implications and historic career of this Augustinian doctrine. Viewed against the standards of his own age and that of the medieval period which followed him, Augustine's anti-Judaism, predicated on the right of Jews to exist and practice their religion, appeared to Blumenkranz restrained indeed, perhaps even beneficent. Yet a harsher, pseudo-Augustinian tradition of anti-Judaism soon eclipsed the moderation of the genuine Augustine, so that medieval Christians commonly invoked him in support of a more rigorous, uncompromising position that did not comport with his own.

Blumenkranz's painstaking study of Augustine's anti-Jewish sermon has laid the groundwork for all subsequent research on the doctrine of Jewish witness, and one ought hardly to belittle the magnitude or the value of his contribution. Nonetheless, I believe that Blumenkranz's conclusions warrant refinement, and that the issues underlying Augustine's attitude towards the Jews and Judaism require some reformulation. First, I believe that Blumenkranz exaggerated the importance of Augustine's *Tractatus adversus Iudaeos*, as it relates both to the patristic literature of anti-Judaism and to the Augustinian corpus in its entirety. Relatively insignificant in Augustine's list of publications, the *Tractatus* adds almost nothing to prior Augustinian ideas. Although it occasionally addresses the Jews rhetorically "as if they were present" (*quasi praesentes*),<sup>7</sup> the *Tractatus* reads like a sermon delivered before a Christian audience, and it contains no evidence of direct face-to-face encounters between the Bishop of Hippo and the Jews. Rather, in its opening chapter it calls for refuting the Jews with arguments that would admittedly have little chance of converting them.

But when these [biblical proofs] are stated to the Jews, they disparage the Gospel and the Apostle; and they do not hear what we are saying, because they do not understand what they read. For if they were to understand

<sup>6</sup> Bernhard Blumenkranz, *Die Judenpredigt Augustins* (Basel, 1946); "Augustin et les Juifs, Augustin et le Judaïsme," *Recherches augustiniennes* 1 (1958), 225-41.

<sup>7</sup> Augustine, *Tractatus adversus Iudaeos* 7.9, PL 42:57.

what the prophet, whom they read, had forecast, "I have given you as a light for the nations, so that you might be my salvation to the ends of the earth," they would not be so blind, so diseased, that they behold in Christ the Lord neither light nor salvation. . . . Therefore (*ergo*), testimonies should be taken from the holy scriptures which have great authority among them. If they will not to be cleansed by the benefit offered to them, they can be convicted by its blatant truth.<sup>8</sup>

On the face of it, the logic of this passage is confounding: The Jews reject the truth of the prophets; *therefore* recite such prophetic testimonies to them! Yet the *Tractatus* concedes twice more that its arguments might make little headway with the Jews, revealing that it intended its message for Christians, and that invective against the Jews and Judaism served as an effective vehicle for transmitting such a message.<sup>9</sup>

Second, Blumenkranz assumed that Augustine's ideas on Jews and Judaism derived from an extended personal encounter with them. While he admitted that Augustine would have had to take a stand on Judaism even in the absence of a Jewish presence, the reality of this presence proved crucial in Blumenkranz's view: It facilitated the exchange of knowledge and ideas; it generated ample opportunity for face-to-face debate; and it impressed upon Augustine the risks to Christians posed by the Jews of his day. Nevertheless, evidence of Jewish settlement in northern Africa during the late imperial period allows only for inconclusive estimations of the size and vitality of specific Jewish communities. Many investigations of this question, in fact, reason circularly, relying predominantly on the limited evidence provided by Augustine himself.<sup>10</sup> Jewish communities clearly existed in numerous North African locations, but we have no good evidence of their size or significance; one highly doubts that Augustine beheld the sort of Jewry encountered by John Chrysostom in late fourth-century Antioch or by Cyril of Alexandria in early fifth-century Egypt.<sup>11</sup> Nor can we simply stipulate a direct link between the proselytizing activity of Jews and the Judaizing tendencies of

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 1.2, PL 42:51-52.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 6.8, 10-15, PL 42:56, 63-64.

<sup>10</sup> See, among others, Paul Monceaux, "Les colonies juives dans l'Afrique romaine," *Revue des études juives* 44 (1902), 1-28; Jean Juster, *Les Juifs dans l'empire romain: Leur condition juridique, économique et sociale*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1914), 1:207-9; H.Z. Hirschberg, *A History of the Jews in North Africa: From Antiquity to Our Time* [Hebrew], 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 1965), 1:51-54; and Marcel Simon, *Vetus Israel: A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135-425)*, tr. H. McKeating (New York, 1986), pp. 331-33.

<sup>11</sup> See Yann le Bohec, "Inscriptions juives et judaïsantes de l'Afrique romaine," *Antiquités africaines* 17 (1981), 165-207; and "Juifs et judaïsants dans l'Afrique romaine: Remarques onomastiques," *ibid.*, pp. 209-29. And cf. Robert L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century* (Berkeley, 1983), and *Judaism and the Early Christian Mind: A Study of Cyril of Alexandria's Exegesis and Theology* (New Haven, 1971); and Wayne A. Meeks and Robert L. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era*, Society for Biblical Literature, Sources for Biblical Study 13 (Missoula, Mont., 1978).

Christians. The available data may suggest that Augustine should have known and dealt with practicing Jews,<sup>12</sup> but his interaction with them undoubtedly lacked the intensity and dangers experienced by John and Cyril.

Augustine's own writings confirm this impression. While they reveal some actual contact with contemporary Jews, much more clearly do they document the limitations of Augustine's familiarity with the Jewish community and with Judaism. Augustine knew an occasional word of Hebrew at most. His allusions to the particulars of Jewish religious practice are so few and so unimpressive, that one cannot justifiably conclude that they derived from personal experience. Augustine acknowledged that his estimation of the reliability of the Jewish texts of Scripture stemmed from hearsay. If some of the unnamed individuals who assisted Augustine in understanding the Old Testament were Jewish, he owed the overwhelming preponderance of his knowledge of postbiblical Jewish tradition to other patristic writers, most notably Jerome.<sup>13</sup> Augustine's laments over the continued refusal of the Jews to accept Christianity—typically contrasted with the more successful attraction of Jews to the church in apostolic times—fail to indicate that they resulted from any personal disappointment in missionary activity.<sup>14</sup> Most of the strictures against Judaizing in the Augustinian corpus appear in lists of unacceptable practices in Christian life, hardly establishing that Augustine deemed such behavior a clear and present danger in his community.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, Blumenkranz's reading of Augustinian anti-Judaism in general, and of the positive, testificatory role of the Diaspora in particular, derives primarily from a narrow focus on the Jews in patristic literature; he paid insufficient attention to the significance of the Jewish question within the

<sup>12</sup> Recently, see Helmut Castritius, "Seid weder den Juden noch den Heiden noch der Gemeinde Gottes ein Ärgernis (1. Kor. 10,32): Zur sozialen und rechtlichen Stellen der Juden im spätrömischen Nordafrika," in *Antisemitismus und jüdischen Geschichte: Studien zu Ehren von Herbert A. Strauss*, ed. Rainer Erb et al. (Berlin, 1987), pp. 47-67; and Le Bohec, "Inscriptions juives," p. 203.

<sup>13</sup> See Blumenkranz, *Die Judenpredigt*, pp. 59-74, with nn. to numerous passages in the Augustinian corpus.

<sup>14</sup> See the passages cited *ibid.*, pp. 110-12.

<sup>15</sup> Even Augustine's frequently cited *Epistula* 196 to Bishop Asellicus, which contains Augustine's most extensive attack on Judaizing Christians, manifests little sense of urgency. The letter notes at the outset that it originated at the insistence of a third bishop, Donatian, that Augustine formulate such a position. And until its concluding paragraph (16, CSEL 57:229), the letter makes no mention of a specific threat to the contemporary Church; only then does it refer to one Aptus (otherwise unknown to Augustine) who, Asellicus wrote "is teaching Christians to Judaize and thus . . . calls himself Jew and Israelite so that he might forbid them [non-kosher] foods." Nowhere does Augustine's letter inveigh against the Jews of his day as the root of such evil within the Church. Recent scholarly investigations minimize the extent to which Jews of the imperial period engaged in missionary activity; see Shaye J.D. Cohen, "Was Judaism in Antiquity a Missionary Religion?" in *Jewish Assimilation, Acculturation, and Accommodation: Past Traditions, Current Issues, and Future Prospects*, ed. Menachem Mor, Creighton University Studies in Jewish Civilization 2 (Lanham, Md., 1992), pp. 14-23, and Martin Goodman, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1994), ch. 6.

broader framework of Augustinian theology and in the development of Augustine's career as a Christian thinker. Even as one correctly notes the novelty of the doctrine of Jewish witness, one ought not to overlook its dependence on a distinctive convergence of historical and exegetical categories, which crystallized during a particular phase in the maturation of Augustine's theology and as a result of developments which transcended his interest in Jews and Judaism.

In view of Augustine's foundational importance and authority in the evolution of Christianity, one can surely understand why Christian scholars may have sought to defend him against charges of Antisemitism; while such investigators might proceed from a particular ideological agenda, their devotion to the Augustinian legacy in general might well illuminate the linkage between the doctrine of Jewish witness and Augustine's other theological concerns. Among recent Catholic treatments of Augustine's teaching on the Jews, that of Marcel Dubois provides the most enlightening contribution to our investigation.<sup>16</sup> Dubois accepted Blumenkranz's conclusions on the threat which Augustine perceived in contemporary Jewish communities and the novelty of the doctrine of witness, but he progressed beyond them, offering a more considered, penetrating analysis of the place of the Jews and Judaism in Augustinian doctrine. His essay on "Jews, Judaism and Israel in the Theology of Saint Augustine" recognizes the secondary importance of the *Tractatus adversus Iudaeos* and thoughtfully considers a broad array of texts drawn from the entire Augustinian corpus. Moreover, it correctly grounds its appraisal of Augustine in the principles of his reading of the Bible, and those of the sacred history which the Bible delineates and underlies. As Dubois sought to differentiate between established Catholic doctrine and more philosophical, less palatable—and therefore dispensable—elements in Augustine's attitude towards the Jews, he focused instructively on its basic ambivalence: On the one hand, Augustine viewed the meanings of Old and New Testaments as essentially identical, such that Jews and Judaism pertain to the crux of God's plan for salvation.

Viewed from this perspective, the words, events and acts of Old and New Testaments appear like sacraments of a unique mystery that appeals to the same attitude of faith. If the difference persists, it is viewed under another

<sup>16</sup> Marcel Dubois, "Jews, Judaism and Israel in the Theology of Saint Augustine: How He Links the Jewish People and the Land of Zion," *Immanuel* 22/23 (1989), 162-214. Other apologetic treatments include F. Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop: The Life and Work of a Father of the Church*, tr. Brian Battershaw and G.R. Lamb (London, 1961), pp. 76-78 (esp. p. 78: "few have had so moving and yet so true a vision of Israel"); Jesús Alvarez, "St. Augustine and Antisemitism," in *Studia patristica* 9,3, ed. F.L. Cross, *Texte und Untersuchungen der altchristlichen Literatur* 94 (Berlin, 1966), pp. 340-49; and *Teología del pueblo judío* (Madrid, 1970).

light that stresses the fundamental continuity of the *intellectus spiritualis*. The opposition is not between Old and New, Jew and Christian, but between closed and open hearts.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, the dualistic tendencies of Augustine's Platonic philosophy led him to emphasize the foundational opposition between old and new, Jew and Christian, and flesh and spirit, yielding a decisively—and irrevocably—negative evaluation of the first member of each pair. Precisely this subjection of biblical exegesis and the study of sacred history to an uncongenial orientation of classical philosophy offends Dubois; and, as a Catholic theologian of the late twentieth century, he wishes to limit its impact on his Augustinian inheritance. "In brief, I can share Augustine's faith and his vision of the Christian economy without sharing his philosophy—above all, without accepting the conceptual system applied by that philosophy."<sup>18</sup> Personal religious commitment has thus led Dubois to minimize the applicability of Augustine's anti-Jewish pronouncements; for these, he has argued repeatedly, refer to something other than real Jews.

Pascal aptly translated Augustine's thought when he remarked that there are Christians of the Old Testament just as there are Jews of the New. Jews and Christians, synagogue and church, are for Augustine *abstract categories that signify not sociological realities but spiritual attitudes*.<sup>19</sup>

Dubois, I believe, has hit upon the key to understanding the sense of the Jew underlying Augustine's doctrine of Jewish witness: the Jew as a determined category which informs *Christian* religious experience—in his words, a spiritual attitude "according to which Christians are invited to judge themselves."<sup>20</sup> Yet Dubois has not followed the ramifications of his insight sufficiently far. Rather, he applied his conclusion selectively, entirely as a means for mitigating the impact of Augustine's *anti*-Jewish sentiments; hatred for the Jew he wrote off to a despised, imaginary construction, contrasting it sharply with Augustine's "benevolent stand . . . on the Jews in terms of their concrete existence."<sup>21</sup> Dubois failed to discern that not only the "bad" but also the "good"—above all, the protective principle of "Slay them not"—in Augustinian teaching on the Jews relates to a hermeneutically crafted construction of a Jew, spawned and nurtured within Augustine's theological discourse. Similarly, as

<sup>17</sup> Dubois, *loc. cit.*, p. 172.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis mine; see also p. 176. While we have followed Dubois in using the terms of synagogue and church rather freely, see the helpful determinations of Emilien Lamirande, "Reliquit et matrem Synagogam: La Synagogue et l'Église selon Saint Augustin," in *Collectanea augustini: Mélanges T.J. van Bavel*, ed. Bernard Brunig et al., Bibliotheca Ephemeridum theologiae lovaniensium 92, 2 vols. (Leuven, 1990), 2:677-88.

<sup>20</sup> Dubois, *loc. cit.*, p. 176.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 212.



Dubois sought to receive and reflect upon the Augustinian legacy from his present-day vantage point, he did not discuss the gradual development of Augustine's attitude towards the Jews during the course of his lengthy career.

Most recently, Paula Fredriksen has endeavored to situate Augustine's innovative doctrine of Jewish witness within the context of specific developments in his life and thought. Like Bernhard Blumenkranz, Fredriksen has highlighted the lasting significance of "Augustine's position on contemporary Jews, with its attendant argument for an immunity from religious coercion enjoyed by virtually no other community in post-Theodosian antiquity."<sup>22</sup> Agreeing further that Augustine's interpretation of Psalm 59:12 undergirded the toleration of medieval Jews in Latin Christendom, she has claimed that "seldom has a biblical hermeneutic had such an immediate and perduring effect."<sup>23</sup> And Fredriksen has followed Marcel Dubois' example in relating the doctrine of Jewish witness to Augustine's biblical hermeneutic and in his concomitant reading of biblical and Jewish history. Yet Fredriksen has ventured beyond both Blumenkranz and Dubois, in her attempt to pinpoint and to explain the appearance of the doctrine of Jewish witness. She has proposed to link it to changes in Augustine's understanding of divine justice and human freedom, of the relative weight of personal faith and God's grace in the process of salvation, during the last decade of the fourth century.

In his earlier years Augustine had taught that God bestows his gift of grace upon those whose freely willed faith warrants it, but beginning in 396 he reversed himself: Now he taught that, among fallen human beings, even the will to open oneself to salvation requires the gift of God's grace, awarded to select individuals for reasons beyond our comprehension. Consequently, Fredriksen has argued, Augustine grew fascinated with the mystery of conversion, first that of Paul and ultimately his own; such fascination heightened his interest in the historical, in the conflicts and unpredictabilities of human experience.<sup>24</sup> Augustine was also influenced by the Origenist controversy in the late fourth-century church, a dispute which cast aspersions on allegorical exegesis, and by the *Liber regularum* (*Book of Rules*) of the Donatist Tyconius, whose typological exegesis of the Old Testament stressed its essential iden-

<sup>22</sup> Paula Fredriksen, "Excaecati occulta iustitia Dei: Augustine on Jews and Judaism," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1995), 300; see also her "Divine Justice and Human Freedom: Augustine on Jews and Judaism, 392-398," in *From Witness to Witchcraft: Jews and Judaism in Medieval Christian Thought*, ed. Jeremy Cohen, Wolfenbütteler Mittelalter-Studien 11 (Wiesbaden, 1996), pp. 29-54.

<sup>23</sup> *Idem*, "Excaecati occulta iustitia Dei," p. 320.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. the similar arguments of F. Edward Cranz, "The Development of Augustine's Ideas on Society before the Donatist Controversy," *Harvard Theological Review* 47 (1954), 255-316; and Robert A. Markus, *Conversion and Disenchantment in Augustine's Spiritual Career* (Villanova, Penn., 1989), pp. 21ff.

tity with the New. Augustine's own biblical hermeneutic now took a decisive turn towards typology, a symbolic reading of Scripture that, unlike classical allegory, preserved the integrity of the historical event even as it disclosed its prefigurative significance.<sup>25</sup> By 397, when Augustine composed his *Contra Faustum* to defend the Old Testament against the attacks of the Manichees, historical simplicity and realism characterized his interpretations. And this Augustinian typology contrasts sharply with more negative appraisals of Mosaic law in the works of two earlier African church fathers, Justin Martyr and Tertullian. While these second and early third-century writers had disparaged the literal understanding of the Old Testament *even in its original, pre-Christian context*, limiting the worth of Hebrew Scripture—and even that of its God!—to their allegorical significance, Augustine now acknowledged the positive value of both. Here, Fredriksen has claimed, lies the basis for Augustine's distinctive ideas on Jews and Judaism.

In Augustine's perspective, Jewish practice and tradition had a certain religious and historical integrity of their own. Biblical Jews, and even the Jews of the apostolic generation, had been right to observe the ordinances of the good Law given by God to Israel through Moses at Sinai. But Augustine's Jewish contemporaries continued to cling to these practices long after their purpose, through Christ, had been fulfilled, and thus as a community they denied and defied not only the universal church, but divine intention. What of them? Precisely because of the integrity of their religious identity, argued Augustine, contemporary Jews performed a unique, and uniquely important, service of witness for the church.<sup>26</sup>

Hence Fredriksen's novel conclusion: "Augustine's teaching on Jews as a protected witness people, a defining theme in his discussion in the *City of God*, was already in place by 398, in the course of his refutation of Faustus the Manichee."<sup>27</sup>

Fredriksen's accounting for the doctrine of Jewish witness in distinctively Augustinian terms marks an important contribution, as does her recognition

<sup>25</sup> Here Fredriksen appears to follow Peter Brown, "St. Augustine's Attitude to Religious Coercion," *Journal of Roman Studies* 54 (1964), 113-14, who writes that at this time Augustine conjured a "double image of the Old Testament—at one and the same time the symbol of an outmoded dispensation and the ever-present precedent for an established religion, enforced by law." On typology, the interpretation of Scripture, and biblical messianism, see, among others, the instructive discussions of Jean Danielou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, tr. Wulstan Hibberd (Westminster, Md., 1959); Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New*, tr. Donald H. Madvig (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1982), pp. 6-7 and *passim*; and, by way of comparison, David Berger, "Three Typological Themes in Early Jewish Messianism: Messiah Son of Joseph, Rabbinic Calculations, and the Figure of Armilus," *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 10 (1985), 141-164. On the Origenist controversy, see the foundational work of Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton, 1992), esp. ch. 5.

<sup>26</sup> Fredriksen, "Excaecati occulta justitia Dei," p. 317.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320.

of the linkage between the Jews, biblical interpretation, and historiosophy in the totality of Augustine's theology. Nevertheless, while my own reading of Augustine shares much with Fredriksen's, we tend to part company on a number of specific issues.<sup>28</sup> First, while Fredriksen has convincingly documented the development in Augustinian teaching on grace and free will, I fail to see the connection she has posited between theodicy and hermeneutics. Exactly what is the "new hermeneutical and theological trajectory—how to read the Bible and understand its meaning—that leads to his [Augustine's] teaching on Jews and Judaism"?<sup>29</sup> How does the indispensability of God's grace even for the human will to have faith mandate a historicizing exegesis?<sup>30</sup> And why need Augustine's typological exegesis in the *Contra Faustum* have included the novel doctrine of Jewish witness? Much remains unexplained.

My second question addresses the novelty and significance that Fredriksen has attributed to typological exegesis in the *Contra Faustum*, where she has perceived a sudden, deliberate hermeneutical shift away from allegoresis, one that led him to the doctrine of Jewish witness. The comparison of the now typologizing Augustine with previous North African champions of Old Testament allegory, Justin Martyr and Tertullian, strikes me as instructive

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 320–21, nn. 59, 61.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307.

<sup>30</sup> Beyond her general assertion, *ibid.*, p. 309, that in 396 Augustine's *Ad Simplicianum* construed the conversion of Paul "not exegetically (as in the Romans commentaries of 394/5) but historically," Fredriksen has not defined the essence of this historicizing shift in Augustine's hermeneutic. Additionally, the appeal to Tyconius as a possible influence on Augustine in this regard yields mixed results. The *Contra Faustum* may reflect a Tyconian commitment to the unity of the two testaments and to the typological exegesis for corroborating it. Yet Tyconius's third rule posits that predestination of the elect corresponds to God's foreknowledge of their will to be saved, the very position which Augustine abandoned in *Ad Simplicianum*! See Tyconius, *Liber regularum* 3 ("De promissis et lege"), in *The Book of Rules*, ed. F.C. Burkitt (Cambridge, Eng., 1894), pp. 12–31 (esp. 22); and Pamela Bright, *The Book of Rules of Tyconius: Its Purpose and Inner Logic*, Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity 2 (Notre Dame, Ind., 1988), pp. 66ff., 102ff. Fredriksen's dismissal of this inconsistency seems overly hasty. (Cf. also her "Beyond the Body/Soul Dichotomy: Augustine on Paul against the Manichees and the Pelagians," *Recherches augustiniennes* 23 [1988], 100: "We should perhaps attend less to the particulars of Tyconius' presentation than to the larger spirit of his enterprise.") For as Fredriksen admits, "*Excaecati occulta iustitia Dei*," p. 319, the *Contra Faustum* itself retains evidence of the older Augustinian stance on free will, specifically with regard to the doctrine of Jewish witness: "Where in the *c. Faustum* Augustine considers the Jews, both ways of conceiving these issues appear. In 12.11, developing the theme of Cain the fratricide as a type of the Jews who killed Christ and who continue to resist the embrace of the church, the pre-396 language of uncompromised volition creeps in. Jews are 'the people who *would* not (*volentis*) be under grace, but under the Law.' Their lack of faith, within this discourse, seems the result of choice" (emphasis Fredriksen's). Finally, Fredriksen has explained elsewhere how, for Tyconius, "the dynamics of salvation, that subtle and mysterious interplay of grace, free will and divine foreknowledge, are constant across nations, times, and individuals . . . as a process, then, salvation history is less linear than interior." See her "Apocalypse and Redemption in Early Christianity: From John of Patmos to Augustine of Hippo," *Vigiliae christianae* 45 (1991), 159. How, then, does Tyconius's "radical agnosticism" vis-à-vis public history (*ibid.*, p. 166) militate towards Augustine's new, more positive estimation of Jews and their past?

but not sufficient. These earlier African fathers had surely "relied on the twin tools of polemic and allegory" in order to defend the Old Testament against dualist heretics; in their view, "the true import of the Law was always exclusively allegorical, hence spiritual, but the Jews had never realized this." But was Augustine of the late 390s the very first to dissent from the view that "the Law, embraced by the Jews as a blessing, had actually been intended as a curse," or that "literal obedience to God's commands was the last thing that God had wanted"?<sup>31</sup>

The *Peri Pascha* of Justin Martyr's mid-to-late second-century colleague Melito, bishop of Sardis, suggests that he was not. Even as it exceeds the hostile typecasting of the Jew that one encounters in the works of Justin and Tertullian, the *Peri Pascha*, presumably a liturgical poem for the celebration of Easter, retreats from Justin's denigration of biblical law. To be sure, some have identified Melito as "the first Christian writer to make an unambiguous accusation of deicide" against the people of Israel as a whole.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, within the context of his church's rites for Easter, which Melito and other "Quartodecimans" insisted on celebrating precisely as the Jews prepared their Passover feast, the bishop offered an elaborate typological scheme for understanding the biblical story of the exodus and the sacrifice of the paschal lamb that figured so centrally within it. On the first, literal level of exegesis, the mystery of the Pascha and its blood saved the Jews from the smiting of the Egyptian first-born and allowed for their liberation from Egyptian bondage. But even as Melito extolled the ancient miracle, he questioned the adequacy of such an interpretation.

O strange and inexpressible mystery!

The slaughter of the sheep was found to be Israel's salvation,  
and the death of the sheep became the people's life,  
and the blood won the angel's respect.

Tell me, angel, what did you respect?

The slaughter of the sheep or the life of the Lord?  
The death of the sheep or the model of the Lord?  
The blood of the sheep or the spirit of the Lord?

It is clear that your respect was won

when you saw the mystery of the Lord occurring in the sheep,  
the life of the Lord in the slaughter of the lamb,  
the model of the Lord in the death of the sheep;  
that is why you did not strike Israel,  
but made only Egypt childless.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Fredriksen, "Excaecati occulta justitia Dei," p. 314.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen G. Wilson, "Melito and Israel," in *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity, Volume 2: Separation and Polemic*, ed. Stephen G. Wilson, Studies in Christianity and Judaism 2 (Waterloo, Ont., 1986), p. 91.

<sup>33</sup> Melito of Sardis, *On Pascha and Fragments* 31-33, ed. and tr. Stuart George Hall (Oxford, 1979), pp. 16-17.

The salvific power of the original paschal lamb derived from its function as a model or *type* (τύπος) whose significance was realized in the mystery of Jesus' crucifixion. Yet in expounding the process and the lesson of his typology, Melito affirmed the literal truth of the Old Testament's miracle-narrative and the cultic observances which it informed in their appropriate time, now long gone. As such, he contrasted old and new covenants in terms quite similar to those of Augustine's *Contra Faustum*.

What once was precious becomes worthless  
when what is truly precious has been revealed.

For to each belongs a proper season:  
a proper time for the model,  
a proper time for the material,  
a proper time for the reality.<sup>34</sup>

For Melito, the Mosaic commandments, though a model of things to come, had once been precious.

Even Origen, the patristic advocate of allegorical exegesis par excellence, had parted company with Justin by acknowledging the erstwhile validity of the literal observance of Mosaic law.<sup>35</sup> But most important of all, Augustine himself, even before his change of heart concerning divine grace and human will, did not espouse so negative a view of the old law. Despite its allegorical interpretation of the biblical creation story, the *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* places a high value on literal exegesis; in his subsequent commentary *De Genesi ad litteram* (*On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis*), Augustine reminisced most instructively regarding the earlier treatise.

I remember what I very much wished to, but could not, accomplish: that all things [in Genesis] be understood in the first instance not figuratively but in their proper sense; and, not despairing completely that they might still be thus understood, I placed this remark at the beginning of the second book . . .

If anyone might wish to interpret literally everything reported [in Genesis]—that is, to understand it precisely as the letter sounds—and can avoid blasphemy and can preach everything in accordance with the Catholic faith, not only should he not be prevented, but he should be considered an especially praiseworthy exegete.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Melito, *Peri Pascha* 37-38, pp. 18-19. On Melito's deliberate rejection of Justin's position, see Wilson, "Melito and Israel," p. 90.

<sup>35</sup> Jean Daniélou, *Origen*, tr. Walter Mitchell (New York, 1955), pp. 139ff.; N.R.M. de Lange, *Origen and the Jews: Studies in Jewish-Christian Relations in Third-Century Palestine* (Cambridge, Eng., 1976), pp. 89ff.; Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, tr. A.S. Worall (Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 61-64.

<sup>36</sup> Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 8.2, CSEL 28,1:232-33, citing *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 2.2.3.

The allegorizing tendency of the *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* hardly echoed Justin Martyr's—or Tertullian's—aversion to the historical sense of the Old Testament, and one ought not to overestimate the significance of the typology found in the *Contra Faustum*. As Augustine himself admitted decades later, only his own inadequacy, not any principled objection, obviated a more historicist interpretation of Genesis. Moreover, while the *Contra Faustum* may well have proffered a typological approach to the old law, I believe that Augustine's later gravitation *away from typology* towards a literalist hermeneutic, one that conferred more value on history in its own right, gave full expression to his doctrine of Jewish witness. Precisely the identification of the Jew with the literal sense of Scripture facilitated his testimonial value in Christendom.

Third, despite the early manifestations of such Augustinian doctrine in the *Contra Faustum*, I cannot agree that the doctrine of Jewish witness was fully in place by 398. As a definition of appropriate Christian attitudes towards the Jews, this doctrine hinges on its distinctive interpretation of the psalmist's injunction, "Slay them not;" Augustine's biblical proof-text lies at the heart of his novel idea, and one may not discount it as an afterthought of secondary importance. A careful review of the Augustinian corpus reveals that this exegesis of Psalm 59:12—along with a clearcut attribution of testimonial value to the Jews' perseverance in their religious observance—was notably absent from the *Contra Faustum* and remained unstated until the second decade of the fifth century.<sup>37</sup> No less telling, fully ripe formulations of the doctrine during Augustine's later years omitted the typological identification of the Jew with Cain and Ham that was so characteristic of the *Contra Faustum*. The link between typology and the doctrine of Jewish witness appears tenuous, and one must look elsewhere than the *Contra Faustum* of the late 390s to comprehend the place of that doctrine in the theology of Augustine.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Augustine's novel invocation of "Slay them not" appeared for the first time in his *Epistula* 149 and *Enarrationes in psalmos* 58. Section 58.1.19 of the latter work ends with the exhortation, "Quid hic respondebit infelix Pelagius," indicating that the commentary could not date from much before 414, when Augustine became actively involved in the Pelagian controversy. See Henri Rondet, "Essais sur la chronologie des 'Enarrationes in Psalmos' de Saint Augustin," *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 71 (1970), 180-82; and Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, p. 232 and n. 307.

<sup>38</sup> Stephen D. Benin, *The Footprints of God: Divine Accommodation in Jewish and Christian Thought* (Albany, 1993), pp. 102-6, provides further corroboration of the pattern of development we have observed in Augustinian doctrine. Addressing the *Contra Faustum*, Benin used the idea of accommodation to depict Augustine's valuation of Judaism in terms quite similar to those of Fredriksen: "Augustine exploits biblical ritual, especially sacrifice, his theory of signs, and historical change in fashioning his rebuttal to Faustus' arguments and in strengthening his defense of the organic link between the testaments . . . Augustine . . . remarks that the Jews alone, of all nations subjugated by Rome, clung to the sign of their religious code . . . They were marked like Cain, and they till the fields of Scripture in a carnal manner, obtaining neither under-

A noted scholar of Judaica correctly observed a century ago that Augustine's pronouncements concerning the Jews "belong to the weakest and least important productions of his pen."<sup>39</sup> Relative to other issues on the agenda of Augustine the bishop and Augustine the theologian, that of the proper Christian attitude toward the Jew paled in its urgency. Nonetheless, the Augustinian construction of Jews and Judaism reflected the depth and complexity of their role in Christian theology; and, when bequeathed to posterity, this construction quickly assumed a life of its own. The doctrine of Jewish witness found a wide range of interpretations and adaptations in early medieval Europe, from the moderate Jewish policy of Gregory the Great to the more restrictive outlooks of Isidore of Seville and Agobard of Lyon. As we noted at the outset, Augustine's testimonial understanding of the psalmists's injunction, "Slay them not, lest at any time they forget your law," continued to exercise the most prominent of high medieval Christians. Even when churchmen of the later Middle Ages sought to undermine the Jewish presence in Christendom, they did not repudiate the vital role that Augustine had accorded the Jews; at times they argued rather that medieval Jews themselves had forsaken it, allowing their religion to deviate from the biblical precepts that bore witness to Christian truth. From the image—and even the flower—of the wandering Jew to the common identification of Jews as the people of the book, the doctrine of Jewish witness has had lasting impact on popular culture as well. The Western Christian idea of the Jew, to which Augustine contributed so roundly, surely deserves recognition and scholarly scrutiny commensurate with its historical importance.<sup>40</sup>

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standing nor solace. . . . Augustine simply reads Jewish history symbolically and converts the Jewish past into a Christian prologue. . . . The sacrifices were used to point to something better and to convey a more profound, hence hidden truth. . . . But the value of symbols and signs must never be forgotten." One notes with interest: Virtually all of Benin's evidence for the linkage between accommodation and Jewish observance dates from before 400 (*De vera religione, Contra Faustum*); from the perspective of accommodation, the significance of Judaism remained primarily significative, and Benin finds no connection between accommodation and the doctrine of Jewish witness.

<sup>39</sup> Louis Ginzberg, "Augustine," *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 2 (New York, 1902), 314.

<sup>40</sup> My forthcoming *Living Letters* (above, n. 5) seeks to respond methodically to this need. Other recent works medieval Christian perceptions and constructions of the Jews, although more limited in their scope, include my *The Friars and the Jews*; R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250* (Oxford, 1987); Gavin I. Langmuir, *History, Religion, and Antisemitism* (Berkeley, 1990) and *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley, 1990); Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (London, 1995); the essays collected in *From Witness to Witchcraft: Jews and Judaism in Medieval Christian Thought*, ed. Jeremy Cohen, Wolfenbütteler Mittelalter-Studien 11 (Wiesbaden, 1996); and Robert Chazan, *Medieval Stereotypes and Modern Antisemitism* (Berkeley, 1997).